

PICTORIAL TREACHERY AS NARRATIVE FAITHFULNESS:
VIRGIL'S GAZE IN BRITISH LIBRARY
MS YATES THOMPSON 36

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On the left side of the Yates Thompson miniature for *Inferno* 33 (fig. 1), in the bas-de-page of fol. 61, Virgil betrays Count Ugolino's treachery. As the count pauses from gnawing on Archbishop Ruggieri's head and tells of being hounded by the bishop's lieutenants, imprisoned with four of his own offspring, enduring their offers of self-sacrifice, and blindly crawling across their bodies, Virgil waves and gazes towards us. With a flash of his palm and a skeptical glance, he invites us to join him in a narrative that counters Ugolino's but corresponds to the rest of the text, not least in betraying the pictorial fiction. As the only figure in the cycle to address us directly, he breaks through the "fourth wall" at one of the very same points in the *Commedia* as does the author. Indeed, the artist joins Dante in thereby capping an extraordinarily subtle, extensive, and polyvalent condemnation of the traitors in general and Ugolino in particular. Here in the second ring of hell's ninth circle, he demonstrates just how thoroughly at least one illuminator could understand and adapt even the most literary of sources.

This remarkable illustration from the mid-to-late 1440s may be more ambitious than many other *Commedia* miniatures, but that should not be surprising. The Aragonese coat of arms on the first folio of the manuscript leaves little doubt that it was intended for the highly discerning patron Alfonso I of Naples (Brieger and Meiss 269). Moreover, its commission may have been arranged by the *Commedia* commentator Guiniforto delli Bargigi, who served as a manuscript collector for Alfonso (Brieger and Meiss 269). And it was almost certainly designed by an illuminator in the very vanguard of Sienese art.

Though we cannot be absolutely sure about the identity of the two main artists who worked on this manuscript, no one has seriously disputed Pope-Hennessy's assertion (21-34) that the sixty-one bas-de-page miniatures accompanying *Paradiso* are by the renowned panel-painter Giovanni di Paolo. Further, it seems quite likely that the historiated initials at the start of each cantica and the forty-eight bas-de-

page miniatures accompanying *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, which were almost certainly illustrated before *Paradiso*, are also by a major Sienese artist. As Meiss has noted (70-80), they are quite similar to works by Priamo della Quercia (ca. 1400-67), who was a brother of the famous sculptor Jacopo (ca. 1371/4-1438) and decorated the Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala in Siena. As Pope-Hennessy has noted, they closely resemble many paintings by the renowned polymath Vecchietta (1412-80), particularly his frescoes for the baptistry of Siena Cathedral (14-16). But even if they are not by one of these two widely acknowledged masters, they are certainly by an extraordinarily skilled painter who was thoroughly immersed in the latest and most prestigious art in Siena. We therefore could hardly hope for a better confluence of artistic, intellectual, and financial resources in a pictorial response to the *Commedia*.

Nor are we likely to find a better measure of the thoroughness with which mid-fifteenth-century illuminators could understand and visually translate verbal sources. In accord with a common practice of the time (Alexander 121-49), the Yates Thompson artists were probably given an iconographic program by Guiniforto or another scholarly advisor. Indeed, the great subtlety with which many of their subjects refer to Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and other Latin texts leaves little doubt that the illuminators had help (David). But they may have also had independent knowledge of Dante's text. Even if they had not read one of the approximately 600 *Commedia* manuscripts that survive from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, or one of the many more copies that have presumably been lost, they may have heard scholarly lectures on it (Parker), listened to public recitations of it (Pope-Hennessy 13), and joined peasants singing it (Sacchetti 1:276-77). That is to say, the ways in which the Yates Thompson illuminators shape their settings, arrange their figures, and otherwise present their subjects may reflect direct responses not only to an advisor's recommendations but also to the *Commedia* itself.

They would therefore also represent profound insight on not only how artists of their time could respond to an extraordinarily subtle and layered text, but also how that particular text was perceived by at least some non-scholars. *Commedia* illuminators obviously had very different means of expression than those of the commentators and other authors to whom modern historians have primarily looked for early responses to Dante's poem. And the illuminators deployed their means in the pursuit of very different goals than those of the early writers.

Whereas the latter explain and contextualize the *Commedia*, the artists were primarily charged with converting Dante's text to images as fully and faithfully as possible (Alexander 121-49). Moreover, the artists came to their task with backgrounds that presumably varied greatly from those of the writers. While the latter probably came from a higher socio-economic level (Alexander 4-34) and almost certainly had more formal education in the production and interpretation of text (Grendler), the illuminators presumably had more training in art and greater exposure to the conversion of text to image. They surely brought unique views to a work whose early reception has been critical to its subsequent reputation.

Perhaps no other *Commedia* illuminator is as singular in his approach to Dante's text as is the first Yates Thompson master, particularly in his depiction of *Inferno* 33. Even as he remains remarkably faithful to the spirit of this canto, he departs from its details in a pattern that comments to an extraordinary degree and with unparalleled complexity on Dante's betrayal of Ugolino's treachery. In contrast to the mid-fourteenth-century illuminator of Budapest University Library MS Codex Italicus 1 (Marchi and Pál), who, in the only other miniature of Ugolino's tale, depicts the count kneeling in front of three figures under an arch, he constructs a six-episode cycle that includes some of the count's more obvious prevarications, some of the doubts Dante casts on Ugolino's innocence, and a few purely pictorial elaborations of those deceits. He passes beyond translation, and even interpretation, to interpolation, as he pictorially reimagines Dante's polyvalent condemnation of the count.

The cycle begins and ends, innocently enough, with Ugolino looking up from Ruggieri's head to address Virgil and Dante. But the pictorial treachery starts just above that scene as two hounds chase four nude boys in an adaptation of the count's efforts to gain unwarranted sympathy. Ugolino claims that, shortly after being locked in the tower with four of his younger relatives, he had a dream in which Ruggieri and three servants, whom he describes as "cagne" 'hounds' (33.31), chase lupine embodiments of the prisoners and tear their flanks with "agute scane" 'sharp fangs' (33.35).¹ The brutality of the episode is underscored by not only the bestial metaphors but also Ugolino's exaggeration of the children's youth and, implicitly, their innocence. The bishop's hounds pursue not five wolves, but rather one wolf and four of its "lupicini" 'whelps' (33.29). And that is only one of several occasions on which Ugolino downplays the age of his fellow prisoners.

Although at least some of Ugolino's children were old enough to have adolescent children of their own, he twice uses the diminutive forms "figliuoli" 'little children' (33.38) or "figliuoi" 'little children' (33.48) for his fellow prisoners and, on another occasion, refers to one of them as "Anselmuccio" 'poor little Anselm' (33.50).² Moreover, in all three of these cases, he concentrates on the immaturity of their behavior (Bàrberi Squarotti). When he awakens from his dream and refers to them as "figliuoli," he hears them weeping for bread in their sleep (33.38-39). When the children are mentioned again shortly thereafter, they are sobbing in response to the tower's being nailed shut (33.46-50). And when Anselm is named, it is because the expression of Ugolino, who has supposedly turned to stone inside (33.49), prompts the crying child to ask him what is wrong (33.51). Ugolino's narrative thereby suggests thriceover that, in contrast to his own stoicism, the other prisoners were consumed by their immediate needs and fears. Like small children, they did not think about what was to come, much less prepare themselves for it.

Indeed, the Yates Thompson illuminator has portrayed them as hardly more than toddlers. The four figures fleeing the hounds up the mountain "per che i Pisan veder Lucca non ponno" 'for which the Pisans cannot see Lucca' (33.30) have the large heads and relatively short, pudgy limbs of babies. Although they are taller than their canine pursuers, the margin is slight, despite the fact that the hounds are lower to the ground than they would be if they were standing, for they are shown reaching their full stride. Evidently, they are about to catch the children, and lest we fail to anticipate the horror that awaits the latter, we have only to note that, in contrast to the canine form of the bishop's lieutenants, Ugolino's fellow prisoners are shown as children. They are the *figli* (sons) to the *padre* (father), rather than the *lupicini* (whelps) to the *lupo* (wolf), and particularly in relationship to the barking hounds that pursue them, they invite greater empathy and sympathy than they might in their bestial form.

As *figli*, moreover, they may deflect more sympathy onto Ugolino than he deserves. Early commentators suggest that at least one and perhaps as many as three of the prisoners were grandsons of the count (Yowell, "Ugolino" esp. 839). Yet not only in the dream does he refer to all of the children as "figli" to the "padre"; on two other occasions in his narrative, as we have seen, he refers to all four of his fellow prisoners as his "figliuoli" or "figliuoi"; on a third occasion he has his grandson Anselm call him "padre" (33.51); and, on a fourth occasion,

he has all of the children call him by that title (33.61). He consistently exaggerates his genealogical, and presumably emotional, proximity to the other prisoners.

Of course, we cannot hold a fictional figure accountable for knowing the historical circumstances of which he or she speaks, but we have at least three reasons to believe that Dante intended for Ugolino's omissions and distortions to be seen as deliberate manipulations of the past. First, Ugolino died in 1289, not long before Dante wrote the *Inferno*. Second, as attested by chronicles of the period (e.g., Villari), the count's demise and the events leading up to it were widely reported during Dante's life. And third, as we shall see, Dante as narrator supplies some of the details conspicuously omitted or distorted by Ugolino. It therefore seems likely that Dante expected his audience, particularly its earliest members, to see the count as not only an unreliable narrator but also a self-interested prevaricator.

In fact, Ugolino's omissions and distortions with regard to the age of his fellow prisoners contribute to a far larger pattern of attempts unfairly to deflect onto himself sympathy due to the children (Yowell "Ugolino's," and Bärberi Squarotti). After describing his fellow prisoners crying for bread in their sleep, he attempts to refract our pity for them through his own dread and bereavement: "Ben se' crudel, se tu già non ti duoli/ pensando ciò che 'l mio cor s'annunziava;/ e se non piangi, di che pianger suoli?" 'You are cruel indeed if you do not grieve already, to think what my heart was foreboding; and if you weep not, at what do you ever weep' (33.40-42). Shortly thereafter, he treats his fellow prisoners as little more than a mirror for his own anxiety: "Come un poco di raggio si fu messo/ nel doloroso carcere, e io scorsi/ per quattro visi il mio aspetto stesso, / ambo le man per lo dolor mi morsi" 'As soon as a little ray made its way into the woeful prison, and I discerned by their four faces the aspect of my own, I bit both my hands for grief' (33.55-58). The *vanitas* implications of the eight first-person singular pronouns in the opening lines of Ugolino's speech are thereby quite literally fulfilled. The children are not mentioned in his preface, and throughout his account the injustice perpetrated against them is treated as mere evidence to determine if Ugolino has been wronged (33.21), for, as the count himself tells us, his story is chiefly about "come la morte mia fu cruda" 'how cruel my death was' (33.20).

Of course, we would have a difficult time on the basis of Ugolino's treachery determining if he was in fact wronged, for he not only gives a highly self-serving interpretation of his terrestrial punishment but also

omits mention of the archbishop's justification for imprisoning him. According to the early-fourteenth-century commentator Guido da Pisa (688), "Nam dum esset dominus civitatis pisane, frumentum occultabat ut fame populi morerentur" 'while [Ugolino] was ruler of the Pisan state, he hid grain, which led to people dying of hunger,' a charge supported by the fourteenth-century *Cronica Fiorentina* (1.250). According to Giovanni Villani (8.47) and other chroniclers of the period, the count ceded four or five fortified towns to Lucca and Florence in 1284. Although he apparently did so to disrupt a menacing alliance that those cities were developing with Genoa and to buy time for Pisa to recover from a devastating defeat by the latter, his Pisan enemies treated the concessions as betrayals and four years later played upon this interpretation to force him out of the city. Ruggieri then invited Ugolino to return under a flag of truce, but for reasons now unknown, the bishop violated the agreement in June 1288 and threw the count, his sons Gaddo and Uguiccione, and his grandsons Anselm and Nino into the tower of the Gualandi. Nine months later the tower was sealed and the keys thrown into a river.

As Ugolino omits these circumstances of his crimes and punishment, and as he disavows responsibility for both that punishment and those omissions by claiming there is no need to tell "Che per l'effetto de' suo' mai pensieri, / fidandomi di lui, io fossi preso / e poscia morto" 'How, by effect of his ill devising, I, trusting in him, was taken and thereafter put to death' (33.16-18), he compounds his original sin (Bàrberi Squarotti esp. 12). That is to say, as he skirts the issue of his earlier treachery and betrays his offspring by redirecting our sympathy for them towards himself, he once again betrays Ruggieri and his other former compatriots, for he falsely suggests that his captors had no justification for punishing the children and him. Indeed, he concomitantly betrays our trust that we are receiving all the facts necessary to assess the fairness, loyalty, and culpability of the participants. In both the form and content of his narrative, he polyvalently renews the treachery for which he was originally condemned to hell.

That sin, moreover, is revealed as such, for Dante repeatedly highlights Ugolino's narrative betrayals. For example, after the count finishes his tale and resumes gnawing on Ruggieri's head, Dante as narrator gives the sobriquet "Brigata" (33.89) for the grandson that Ugolino does not name. The poet thereby reminds anyone familiar with the well-known history of the episode that not all of Ugolino's fellow

prisoners were his sons. And shortly before naming Brigata, Dante as narrator foregrounds a far more glaring and important omission in Ugolino's story by mentioning that the count was reputed to have betrayed the castles of Pisa (33.85-86). Favoring the possibility that Ugolino did not act out of patriotic motives, Dante thereby justifies the count's punishment and explains why the narrator refers to him as a "peccator" 'sinner' (33.2), which is one of only fifteen uses of this term or its derivatives in the *Commedia*. With a single remark, the poet both directly counters Ugolino's efforts to promote his own innocence and, by suggesting that the count is an unreliable narrator, indirectly undermines the rest of his self-definition as a victim.

And that attempt by Ugolino to portray himself as a subject worthy of our compassion is further betrayed by the lack of sympathy he garners from the narrator (Hollander, *Allegory* 306-07). In that role, Dante not only conspicuously omits any expression of compassion for the count but also evinces his horror and disgust at Ugolino's gnawing on Ruggieri's head. For example, he suggests the most gruesome of details by invoking lines 760-61 in book eight of Statius's *Thebaid*, by comparing Ugolino to Tydeus, who was "effracti perfusum tabe cerebri . . . uiuo scelerantem sanguine fauces" 'befouled with shattered brains . . . his jaws polluted with living blood.' Moreover, as narrator, Dante compares Ugolino on several occasions to an animal (Yowell, "Ugolino's" esp. 122). Upon first seeing the count, for example, Dante describes the biting of Ruggieri's head as a "bestial segno" 'bestial . . . sign' (32.133). And when Ugolino finishes his tale and returns to Ruggieri's head, he does so with teeth "che furo a l'osso, come d'un can, forti" 'which were strong on the bone like a dog's' (33.78). Although the count attempts to tease tears from his audience, he who turned to stone in the face of his weeping offspring is portrayed as neither better nor more pitiable than a conscienceless beast, as being utterly unworthy of our sympathy.

The count's offspring, on the other hand, are treated as being deeply and truly worthy of our pity. After Ugolino finishes his account, Dante as narrator expresses the wish that the coastal islands Caprara and Gorgona would dam the Arno and drown Pisa, for, as he says to Pisa, "non dovei tu i figliuoi porre a tal croce" 'you ought not to have put [Ugolino's] children to such torture' (33.87). This, as Yowell notes ("Ugolino's" 137), serves as the concluding gloss on the episode and emphasizes Ugolino's bestial silence by correcting it. Moreover, in comparing Pisa to Thebes, Dante goes on to note that, unlike Ugolino,

“l’età novella” ‘the youthful years’ of the children made them innocent (33.88). That is to say, they were not responsible for their own imprisonment and are therefore worthy of our compassion.

Nor is the narrator alone in exculpating the children and condemning Ugolino, for Dante, as author, damns the count through the latter’s own words. Indeed, as Yowell has noted (“Ugolino’s” 124-25), Ugolino’s entire account recalls the deceptive speech of Sinon the Greek in the *Aeneid*. Bemoaning the fate of his children, who will perhaps be executed for his own treachery, Sinon, too, presents himself in the most emotional of terms as a concerned father (2.69-140). But as the Trojans discover only after they spare his life, Sinon’s tears are counterfeit (2.195-96). Like Ugolino, he plays upon the kindness and trust of the audience to gain unwarranted sympathy. Thus, the count invokes a literary analogy that parallels his own historical deceit and, by referencing an earlier text, advertises that his speech is not entirely his own, that it is a construct built at least in part on the experiences of another literary figure.

And lest we forget the textuality of Ugolino’s account, at least three other allusions highlight its literary dimension. The count’s opening remark, “Tu vuo’ ch’io rinovelli/ disperato dolor che ’l cor mi preme/ già pur pensando, pria ch’io ne favelli” ‘You will have me renew desperate grief, which even to think of wrings my heart before I speak of it’ (33.4-6), recalls Aeneas’s words to Dido in *Aeneid* 2.3-12: “Infandum, regina, iubes renovare dolorem . . . quamquam animus meminisse horret luctuque refugit” ‘O Queen—too terrible for tongues the pain you ask me to renew . . . although my mind, remembering, recoils in grief and trembles.’ Nevertheless, as Freccero notes, Ugolino’s accent falls on words such as “disperato” and “preme” that express the violence of his passions, whereas Aeneas emphasizes words such as “infandum” that express the ineffability of his pain (60), and as Boitani notes (74), Ugolino suggests his grief is greater than Aeneas’s, for it is not just “inexpressible” or “terrible” but desperate. The count’s opening remark also recalls Francesca’s preface in *Inferno* 5.121-23, for, just before giving an account of her past, Francesca claims, “Nessun maggior dolore/ che ricordarsi del tempo felice / ne la miseria” ‘There is no greater sorrow than to recall, in wretchedness, the happy time,’ which, according to Hollander, was an attempt by Dante to convey that Ugolino, like Francesca, desires the pilgrim’s sympathy and our compassion but does not deserve either one (“*Inferno* XXXIII” 550). Further, Ugolino’s claim, “parlare e lagrimar vedrai insieme”

'you shall see me speak and weep together' (33.9), closely echoes Francesca's prefatory remark, "dirò come colui che piange e dice" 'I will tell as one who weeps and tells' (5.126), although, as Yowell notes, while Francesca describes the pitiable style in which she will recount her tale, Ugolino "simply advertises and underscores the upcoming speech performance" ("Ugolino's" 125). Thus, through reference to an outside text and, more emphatically, through allusions to an earlier speech in the *Commedia*, Dante as author underscores that Ugolino's account is a fabrication, a construct that may or may not be true.

Nor does the first Yates Thompson illuminator support Ugolino's attempts to engender sympathy. Indeed, he entirely omits the count from the dream scene. Only four figures flee the hounds, and, as noted earlier, all four have the proportions of small children. Moreover, they and their immediate setting are distinguished in at least four major ways from Ugolino, the ice in which he is partially submerged, and, sometimes, the rest of the miniature. First, there is a steep drop from the slope on which the children flee to an undefined middle ground just above Ugolino; second, the slope beneath the children's feet is far brighter than the ground elsewhere in the illustration; third, the children in the dream appear far smaller than the other figures in the image, including their own counterparts in the tower; and fourth, the children and the hounds race against the flow of the other scenes in the image and of the other illustrations in the cycle, because most of those images unfold from left to right in accord with western reading habits and pre-modern artistic practice (Schapiro esp. 38-39). The illuminator thus resists the possible equation of the children's persecution in the dream with the count's suffering in hell and thereby undermines Ugolino's attempt in this portion of the narrative to build sympathy for himself.

Nor does the artist promote Ugolino's subsequent efforts to gain our pity. After the door to the tower is nailed shut and the children weep for a day and a night, Ugolino sees his own gaze reflected in their faces and bites both his hands. He claims to have done so out of grief, but the children interpret his motive as hunger, and, indeed, the Yates Thompson illuminator imbues Ugolino with such aggression that the count seems about to cannibalize the children. While furrowing his brow and assuming an expression suggesting ferocity rather than anxiety, Ugolino bites his hands so fully that he seems to be swallowing them and so hard that blood pours from them. Moreover, he strikes an unnecessarily confrontational pose: instead of standing

still, he advances towards the other prisoners, as they retreat to the far corner of the tower and press their palms together in a timeless gesture of prayer or beseeching. Are they, in fact, willingly offering him their “*misere carni*” ‘wretched flesh’ as they do in the text (33.63), or are they pleading for deliverance from his looming figure? Is he choking back his anguish at the prisoners’ plight, or is he seeking to satisfy the hunger of his distended stomach, to reclaim the skin in which he clothed the children? The proximity of the savage attack in the dream and the lack of a mandorla or other dream signifier to distinguish this scene in the tower from the rest of the miniature suggest impending cannibalism, but the matter is settled neither in this scene nor in the next one. Just below the figure of Ugolino biting his hands, we see him sprawled across the bodies of his offspring. It is not clear whether he is calling their names, as he claims in the text (33.74), or beginning to eat them. The degree to which his massive body seems to weigh upon the tiny toddlers suggests oppression rather than compassion, and the red of his lips establishes a vertical link to the blood spilling from the mouth of his standing figure, as well as to the blood on the back of Ruggieri’s skull. But the mouth of the prone count does not conclusively grip the face of the child beneath him, for the intersection of Ugolino’s slightly parted lips with the contour of the child’s cheek is such that the count may be seen as merely opening or closing his mouth without contacting the child. The illuminator thereby betrays Ugolino twice over, for even as the miniature hints that the count did indeed eat his children, it echoes his own treacherous evasion on this issue. That is to say, it invokes the count’s last line, “*Poscia, più che ’l dolor, poté ’l digiuno*” ‘Then fasting did more than grief had done’ (33.75), which, according to Yowell, forces the reader to at least consider the count’s cannibalism (“Ugolino’s” 134), and which, by its “undeniably and intentional” ambiguity, leaves the reader with what Boitani describes as “no peace, no catharsis, just ‘the last syllable of recorded time’” (84).

Of course, regardless of whether or not the viewer concludes that the count did in fact eat his offspring, the pictorial echo of the textual equivocation on this matter underscores the artifice of the narrative as a whole. All statements invite interpretation, but open-ended remarks do so most blatantly. Though they may not shift any greater burden of interpretation onto our shoulders than do conclusive statements, they emphasize the presence of that burden. They highlight the fact that the form of the narrative to some degree rests on perception, thereby foregrounding our role as interpreter. They acknowledge that the text in

general—and, in this case, the count's narrative in particular—are constructs of the author/artist and reader/viewer.

Moreover, in this case, they may foreground that fact to an extraordinary degree, for Dante's account of this episode is replete with references to speech and to the count's mouth, to an instrument of not only language but also the sin around which Ugolino verbally dances (Yowell, "Ugolino's" 123). In exchange for the count's telling his tale, Dante offers to repay him on earth "se quella con ch'io parlo non si secca" 'if that with which I speak does not dry up' (32.139), whereupon Ugolino is described as raising his mouth—rather than, say, his eyes—from his "fiero pasto" 'savage repast' (33.1) and declaring, "se le mie parole esser dien seme / che frutti infamia al traditor ch'i' rodo, / parlare e lagrimar vedrai insieme" 'if my words are to be seed that may bear fruit of infamy to the traitor whom I gnaw, you shall see me speak and weep together' (33.7-9). And, as we have seen, when the count hears that the pilgrim is Florentine, he presumes that Dante knows some circumstances of the imprisonment but claims, "quel che non puoi avere inteso, / . . . udirai" 'what you cannot have heard, . . . you shall hear' (33.19-21). He then recounts a story that revolves to no small degree around the anxiety fostered by his own miscommunication or lack of communication with the other prisoners. As they cry in the wake of the tower's being sealed, he remains so stoic that Anselm is prompted to say, "Tu guardi sì, padre! che hai?" 'You look so, father, what ails you?' (33.51). But rather than reply, Ugolino claims to have shed no tears at even that pitiful question and not to have answered "tutto quel giorno né la notte appresso" 'all that day, nor the night after' (33.53). He does perhaps respond the next morning in the biting of his hands, but as we saw, this only creates further confusion, a misunderstanding that Ugolino answers by nothing more than calming himself and joining the children in silence. These actions are treated by the count as benevolent, as efforts to keep the children from more sadness (33.64), but on the fourth day, Gaddo throws himself at Ugolino's feet and implores, "Padre mio, ché non m'aiuti?" 'Father, why do you not help me?' (33.69), to which the count evidently does not reply. Indeed, he seems not to offer any words of consolation to the children as they die, and only after their deaths does he break his silence, calling their names without answer for two days. With the very instrument of his possible cannibalism, he verbally betrays them—and us. He demonstrates a lack of scruples with regard to the historical transgression for which Dante assigns him to this portion of hell.

Of course, those hints at his nefariousness are not nearly as blunt as the many allusions in this episode to cannibalism itself (Yowell, “Ugolino’s” esp. 134-36). As we have seen, the count is gnawing on Ruggieri’s head when the pilgrim comes upon them; the count dreams of sharp fangs tearing into his own and the children’s flanks; he bites his hands when he sees his own gaze reflected in the children’s faces; and, in response to his gesture, they offer to satiate his hunger with their own flesh. Moreover, as Ugolino himself notes, he called the names of the other prisoners until “più che ’l dolor, poté ’l digiuno” ‘fasting did more than grief had done’ (33.75). That is to say, he opens the possibility that hunger overwhelmed his sorrow and drove him to eat the children. Although he may in fact have meant that his terrestrial grief was extinguished only by death from starvation, he reinforces the cannibalistic implications of the many references to speech in this episode, particularly his mention in the previous line of calling the children’s names for two days, and he implies that cannibalism is the reason he “riprese ’l teschio misero co’ denti” ‘again took hold of the wretched skull with his teeth’ (33.77) after uttering that last line. He invites us to wonder how literally his infernal punishment responds to his terrestrial sins.

But perhaps our clearest invitation to doubt Ugolino’s narrative, particularly the self-portrait as a pure victim, springs from Virgil in the Yates Thompson miniature. Prior to this point in the illustration cycle, Virgil and Dante establish narrative vectors in almost every direction except towards us. Rather than placing them only in the foreground, like the figures in almost all other *Commedia* cycles, the illustrator situates them throughout the various landscapes. In *Inferno* 9 they stand farther from the bottom edge of the frame when they are just outside the gate of Dis than when Virgil is shielding Dante’s eyes on the far left side of the illustration (fig. 2). In *Inferno* 6 they are even farther from the lower edge than they are at any point in *Inferno* 9. And in *Inferno* 12 they enter the scene from a steep path in the background at the upper left and exit at the upper right (fig. 3). Moreover, even when they do stand in a foreground frieze, they often gaze or gesture in a fashion that enlivens other portions of the setting, as in *Inferno* 7, when Virgil looks towards Dante on the near side of and slightly behind him, or in *Inferno* 18, when Virgil looks just to our right as he opens his mouth towards us (fig. 4). And although it is exceedingly rare for either of them to turn his back on us in other illustration cycles, they often do so in the Yates Thompson miniatures, for instance when addressing the carnal sinners

in *Inferno* 5, approaching Dis in *Inferno* 8, or watching the barrators in *Inferno* 21 and 22 (fig. 5). Through the mobility of their bodies and of their gazes, they establish a voluminous world that increasingly resembles our own, even as they seem ever more conspicuously to ignore our presence.

Indeed, by the time Virgil addresses us in the miniature of *Inferno* 33, this tension has grown so great that it virtually guarantees that his wave and gaze will not merely extend the pictorial fiction, for as his earlier images come ever closer to the “fourth wall” yet consistently retreat from it, they establish a pattern that enhances the abruptness when Virgil finally does acknowledge our presence. The earlier images ensure that Virgil’s wave and gaze here not only stretch the imaginary barrier that separates him from the audience but break through it. Yet neither Virgil nor any other aspect of the image necessarily terminates the pictorial fiction, for as he addresses us, he does so in a conspiratorial manner that invites us to a second, simultaneous fiction. Rather than turning his attention towards us and cutting off Ugolino, rather than shattering the fourth wall and the first fiction, he quickly and covertly acknowledges us as he allows Ugolino and the first fiction to continue through the disruption. With a low, discreet palm and a quick, sidelong glance, he invites us to join him not in ignoring but in doubting the count. He betrays Ugolino by allowing him to continue his treacherous account and simultaneously dismissing it.

This disruption is, of course, uniquely pictorial in its means, but it invokes the extraordinarily numerous shifts among speakers, among audiences, and among tones in the text for this episode.³ After describing Ugolino, the narrator quotes the pilgrim’s invitation to the count to speak (32.125-32) and details Ugolino’s preparations for doing so (33.1-3). The count then addresses the pilgrim’s request (33.4-15) and launches into the memory of starving in the tower (33.16-75). But he pauses twenty-four lines later, just four lines after the dream about the hounds (33.28-36), to remind his listeners that they would be cruel indeed if his tale had not yet made them weep (33.40-42). And he interrupts his story twice more in his few remaining lines, once to curse the earth for not swallowing him and his offspring before they reached the worst of their suffering (33.66), and once to compare the proximity of his offspring in the tower with his own distance from Virgil and the pilgrim in hell (33.70-72). Moreover, his tale is then framed by the narrator’s description of the count (33.76-78) and the attack on Pisa for its treatment of Ugolino’s fellow prisoners (33.79-90). Thus, we are

never to immerse ourselves for more than a few lines in the scene that unfolded in the tower. We are frequently reminded that we are looking at a multilayered narrative in which Dante as author records Dante as narrator recounting Dante as pilgrim remembering Ugolino as narrator telling of events supposedly experienced by Ugolino as protagonist.

Further, perhaps to ensure that readers will not still overlook the textuality of Dante's narrative, many of these interruptions foreground themselves either by means of being notably obvious or notably subtle. The more abrupt changes in speaker, such as that between the end of canto 32, when the pilgrim invites Ugolino to speak, and the beginning of canto 33, when the narrator describes Ugolino's preparations to do so, overtly advertise themselves. But they do not necessarily foreground textuality any more than do the more subtle shifts in tone, voice, or audience, such as the comparison between how the count is perceived by his listeners and how he perceived his offspring, for these comparatively gentle transitions demand our attention to avoid confusion. By calling for close reading, they underscore that we are in fact looking at a text, rather than at the events described in the text.

Of course, relatively few of those specific shifts in tone, voice, or audience are portrayed by the first Yates Thompson illuminator, who, even had he wished to incorporate all of them, probably did not have the means to do so in the space allotted for this episode. Moreover, he downplays many of those that he does capture. For example, as we have seen, he does not use a mandorla or other frame to distinguish the dream scene from the rest of his pictorial cycle. With merely a variation in the tint and angle of the setting, as well as in the direction of the narrative, he sets the dream apart from the narrative unfolding around it and minimizes its intrusion on the rest of the illustration cycle.

Yet, in having Virgil look and wave towards us from the left side of the image, the illustrator in many ways sums up one possible effect of all these textual shifts in tone, voice, and audience. As Virgil invites us to have an ocular and corporeal dialogue with him, he becomes the first character to break through the "fourth wall" and to address us directly. In both means and ends, he radically departs from earlier conventions of pictorial representation in this manuscript. And in thereby betraying the fiction, he crowns an extraordinarily subtle, sophisticated, and polyvalent portrayal of the central theme in this episode. He represents the most complex and perhaps cogent of the many ways by which his illuminator has betrayed a traitor, by which the artist demonstrates how thoroughly he, and perhaps some of his

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contemporaries, had penetrated one of the most complex and refined texts of their day.

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Notes

¹ Quotations of the *Commedia* come from Petrocchi's edition. The translations are from Singleton.

² Even in the fourteenth century, there was some confusion over the number, identity, and generations of the prisoners. Dante names two grandchildren among Ugolino's companions, and most modern scholars agree, as in Lonergan (80). But Andrea di ser Lancia (formerly known as the Ottimo commentator) noted in approximately 1333-34, not long after Ugolino's death, that the Count was imprisoned with "quattro suoi figliuoli, ovvero tre figliuoli e uno nepote, ovvero due figliuoli e due nepoti" (1:562), and the late-fourteenth-century chronicler Giovanni Villani claims (8:47) there were three "nepoti." For more on early perceptions of the prisoners, see Boitani (76-77). In "Ugolino's," Yowell conjectures (131) that Ugolino may refer to two of the children by name to elicit compassion from his audience. For a recent history of the episode, see Yowell's "Ugolino."

³ Yowell claims ("Ugolino's" 139n18) that the "disjunction between the narrative levels in Ugolino's episode is more emphatic than in any other episode," as she breaks the pilgrim's encounter with Ugolino into three narrative levels. Level "A" is the third-person description of Ugolino by the pilgrim/poet, particularly *Inferno* 32.125-33.3 and 33.76-78. Level "B" is the first-person account by Ugolino in *Inferno* 33.4-21, 40-42, 66, and 75. And Level "C", showing Ugolino at a fixed time on earth, opens with *Inferno* 33.22—the first line of the dream sequence. Yowell then demonstrates how the narrative progresses rapidly through these levels, switching often from one to the other and exposing the rhetorical nature of the episode, the speech that constitutes its "bestial segno."

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Figure 1. Sienese. The Traitors, *Inferno* 33. Mid- to late 1440s. London, British Library, MS Yates Thompson 36, fol. 59. © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved.

et si fuggir le frere et li pastori



Figure 2. Sienese. The Approach and Entry into Dis, *Inferno* 9. Mid- to late 1440s. London, British Library, MS Yates Thompson 36, fol. 16. © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved.

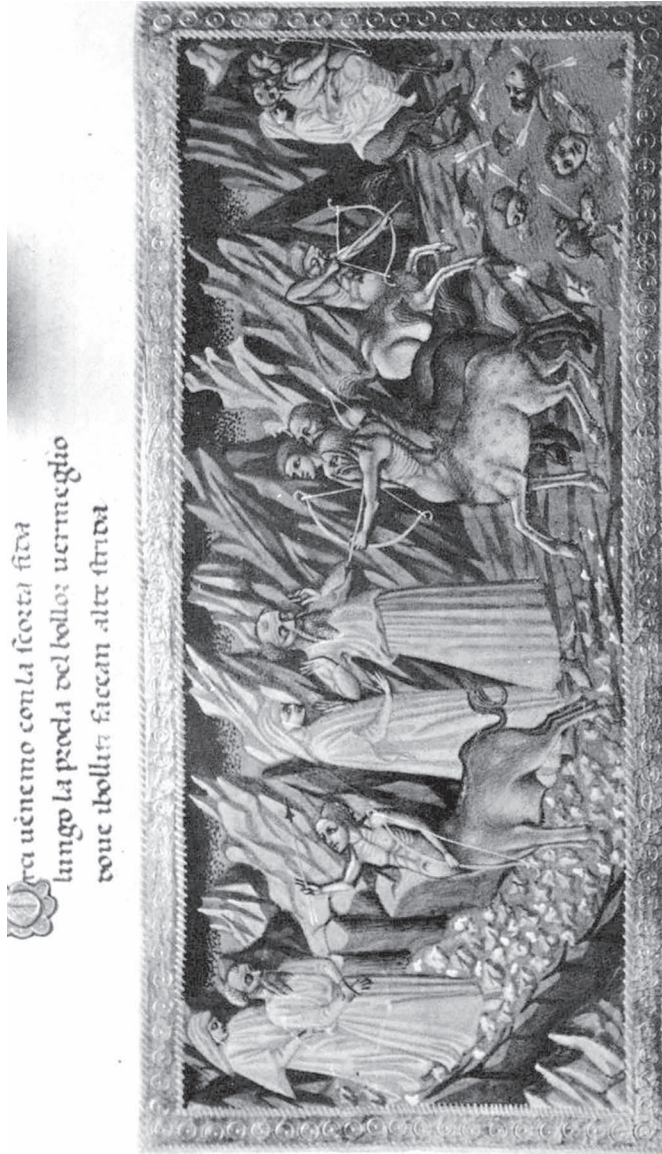


Figure 3. Sienese. The Centaurs and the Tyrants, Inferno 12. Mid- to late 1440s. London, British Library. MS Yates Thompson 36, fol. 21v. © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved.



Figure 4. Sienese. The anderers, Sedu ers, and Flatterers, Inferno 1 . Mid- to late 1440s. London, British Library, MS Yates Thompson 36, fol. 32. © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved.



Figure . Sienese. The Barrators, *Inferno* 22. Mid- to late 1440s. London, British Library, MS Yates Thompson 36, fol. 3 v. © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved.